



March 14, 2022

Connecticut General Assembly, Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3000
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony Regarding House Bill 5364, An Act Concerning the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund

Dear Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Ruth Canovi. I am the Director of Advocacy for the American Lung Association in Connecticut. The Lung Association works to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through research, education and advocacy. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB5364, An Act Concerning the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund. It is clear this committee recognizes the very real and very present burden tobacco products have on our communities. We strongly urge the committee to dedicate at least \$12 million towards the state tobacco control program for this year and all future budgets until tobacco use is a public health problem of the past.

When it comes to tobacco, the evidence is clear that we need to make an investment in our future:

- Tobacco use remains a major public health crisis in Connecticut - 4,900 Connecticut residents die from tobacco-related illness annually.
- Tobacco use costs Connecticut more than \$2 billion in annual health care costs, including \$520.8 million in Medicaid spending every year.¹
- Despite cigarette smoking rates being near all-time lows, overall tobacco product use among adults increased in 2019. Youth tobacco use rates remain at significant levels. The newly released National Tobacco Youth Survey data found that 13.4% of high school students reported using a tobacco product

in 2021. In 2019 in Connecticut, which is the most recent data we have, 27.8% of high school students used tobacco products.

- The most recent NYTS data showed that in 2021, 65.3% of students who currently used tobacco products were seriously thinking about quitting the use of all products and 60.2% had stopped using products for a day or more because they were trying to quit. ²

Connecticut cannot afford to continue its history of woefully underfunding our state tobacco control program. Connecticut has not budgeted state funds to our state tobacco prevention and cessation programs since Fiscal Year 2015. The 2018 budget completely eliminated the language that transferred money to the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund, which was the sole source of state tobacco prevention funding. The leading cause of preventable disease and death in our state deserves more. Our kids, our families, our neighbors deserve more. Thank you for the proposal to reinstate the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund and reestablish funding at \$4M. I urge you to raise that investment to \$12M annually. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends Connecticut spend \$32 million every year on its Tobacco Control Program. The state has not spent that cumulatively in more than 2 decades. When we consider the fact that we have the second highest cigarette tax in the country and still receive than \$120 million from the 1998 tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, our funding status is especially egregious. Connecticut is the only state in the country that provided \$0 of state funding for its state tobacco control program in 2021.³

The investment to prevent young people from getting hooked on nicotine and helping those who are to quit in addition to saving lives actually does save money. A study conducted by the University of North Carolina concluded that when Connecticut actually funded these programs, the state saved \$2.48 for every dollar invested in current tobacco control programs⁴. There is real opportunity here, as notably, when states invested sustainably at robust levels, states have seen returns on their consistent investments as high as \$55 to \$1.

Thank you again for your leadership in tobacco policy issues. We do have a concern regarding the language in this bill and that is – we must find a way to keep history from repeating itself. From 2003 – 2018, we saw the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund swept 80 times and the transfer to the fund stopped or diminished any time there were gaps needing filling in the budget. The language is all back budget narrative language that advocates don't see before the budget is voted on and many times lawmakers don't know or have the time to look for it. We would encourage you to consider using a line item for

this funding to help ensure transparency. Again, we strongly encourage you to invest at least \$12 million of the \$473 million in tax revenue and Master Settlement Agreement funds Connecticut receives annually, to help those addicted to nicotine quit and to help offset the millions of dollars the tobacco industry is spending on hooking this new generation.

Thank you so much to this committee for your continued leadership on tobacco policies.

Sincerely,

Ruth Canovi, MPH

Director, Advocacy

American Lung Association in Connecticut

¹ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. *The Toll of Tobacco in Connecticut*. Accessed February 23, 2022. .
https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/connecticut

² - Gentzke AS, Wang TW, Cornelius M, et al. Tobacco Product Use and Associated Factors Among Middle and High School Students — National Youth Tobacco Survey, United States, 2021. *MMWR Surveill Summ* 2022;71(No. SS-5):1–29.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7105a1>[external icon](#).

³ 2022 State of Tobacco Control Report. American Lung Association. www.lung.org/sotc Accessed February 23, 2022.

⁴ Summary of the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund Programs. 2003 – 2018. [Tobacco-and-Health-Trust-Funded-Programs-2003-2018.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#) Accessed February 23, 2022.